

An Archaeological Resource Assessment of the Roman Period in Lincolnshire

Mark Bennet

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Roman Conquest

The movement of the Roman military northwards into Lincolnshire is not fully understood and even the dates are conjectural. The local tribal grouping was the Corieltavi and it is not known whether they surrendered to Rome soon after the invasion started or fought the invasion. The sources concentrate on the fighting further south against the Catevellauni and their allies. The archaeological record has produced no certain evidence either way.

There was possibly no love lost with the neighbouring Catuvellauni. There had perhaps been friction between the Corieltavi and an assertive Catuvellauni before AD 43 and coin evidence suggests some Corieltavi territory may have come under Catuvellauni influence (Curteis 1996, 22).

The Romans would seek to establish a degree of control over a defeated people by placing forts to dominate important native centres, as at Colchester. The assumed early fort at Lincoln has not been found although it was perhaps down hill and that is where initial evidence for Iron Age settlement has been identified. There is some evidence for a fort at Ancaster a place with Iron Age settlement, and tentative aerial photographic evidence for a fort at Owmbly. There is, however, no known fort at Sleaford, probably the most important Corieltavi centre with its mint (Elsdon 1997, 75-76).

The push northwards after the initial invasion aimed to secure the Trent Valley and the Humber estuary and was almost certainly spearheaded by the Ninth Legion with its attached *auxilia*. The early distribution of Roman military forces in the east Midlands is in a series of vexillation forts placed at strategic points, as at Longthorpe, Newton-on-Trent, Osmanthorpe (Bishop & Freeman 1993), Rossington (Van de Noort & Ellis 1997, 275-78), probably Kirmington (Jones & Whitwell 1991), perhaps Lincoln and possibly at Ancaster. These dispositions served to control a broad swath of territory along the line of the Trent and up to the Humber estuary. There is evidence for first century military buildings at Old Winteringham but no evidence for a Roman fort. Early coinage has been found at Caistor and at Horncastle with first century pottery but no certain evidence for forts at either location. There is a small, 1.8 acre, Roman fort at Marton of uncertain date but may well be early.

The greatest challenge to Roman rule in the new province of Britannia occurred in AD 60/61 with the revolt of Boudicca and the Iceni. Again neither the written sources nor the archaeological record provide any certain information on the attitude of the Corieltavi to this revolt. It is known that a contingent of the Ninth Legion suffered a defeat at the hands of the rebels while marching southwards to aid Colchester. The cavalry alone escaped to take refuge in a fort, probably Longthorpe. There is no suggestion that any part of the Ninth Legion took part in the final battle that defeated Boudicca and it is possible that the surviving vexillations were needed to maintain order in the east Midlands. The Roman put down the remnants of the revolt with fire and sword but there is no archaeological evidence to indicate the situation in Lincolnshire.

Towns

The Lincoln UAD project will result in a research framework tailored to the city specifically. Consequently slightly less emphasis has been placed on Lincoln in this section.

There was a Legionary fortress at the top of the hill during the reign of Nero, perhaps in AD 61 after the Boudicca revolt. Detailed information on the dates and extent of the legionary occupation at Lincoln is not known. After the legionaries left the Romans founded a colony on the site. In the late first to early second century there was a major public works programme. The city thrived spreading down to the Witham and along the roads north and south of the walled enclosure.

In the later Empire Lincoln became a provincial capital. The fortifications were improved and the city continued to have a strong urban presence in the mid to late fourth century. Larger houses are built in

the city from the second century onwards, some at least by wealthy government officials based at this administrative centre. There is some evidence for a Christian community surviving into the fifth century.

A number of other settlements generally referred to as 'small towns' exist in the county. They have received varying amounts of archaeological work and for some of them little can be said other than providing their location. Some, spaced at regular intervals on the main roads, probably owed some of their status to the Roman imperial posting houses that were probably situated there. Others acted as markets to the surrounding countryside providing manufactured goods to the villages and farmsteads around them. In the later empire some acted as collection points for the imperial tax these sites are probably those which were walled: Caistor, Horncastle, Ancaster, together with Lincoln. Virtually all of these sites are considered to have had Iron Age precursors of varying size and status. However since late Iron Age pottery continues in use into the Roman period confirming Iron Age occupation can be difficult in the absence of wider excavation. Very little work has been done on the hinterland of these Roman small towns, they are incompletely understood.

Ancaster. Defended town on the site of an Iron Age settlement only limited work has been carried out inside the defenses. Excavations by Nottingham University in the cemetery west of the town not fully published. Later work concentrated on the defences (Todd 1981).

Bourne. Roman material has been found in some abundance but no systematic excavation has occurred. Pottery kilns have been discovered. The site is assumed to have been a locally significant Roman settlement.

Caistor. Small scale excavations concentrating on the defences (Rahtz, 1959). Late Roman defences with towers. The interior of the walled area is mostly unexplored.

Dragonby. Excavations recently published (May, 1996).

Foston. An extensive scatter of Roman material (Whitwell 1992, 76-77).

Hibaldstow. Excavations but no comprehensive publication. The earliest evidence for occupation suggests a date in the late first century. Occupation continued into the late fourth century. There is no Iron Age settlement evidence from the Roman site itself (Smith 1987, 189-98).

Horncastle. A number of excavations have been published together with a discussion of the site (Field and Hurst, 1983).

Kirmington. Surveyed from aerial photographs and some metalwork recorded. A native settlement, then a fort followed by a sprawling settlement that continued into the fifth century (Jones & Whitwell, 1991).

Ludford. Extensive finds of Roman pottery, coins, building material suggests a locally important site. Iron Age coins have been found.

Navenby. Limited recent excavations in advance of development. The remains discovered were dated to the third and fourth century but the lower levels were not disturbed. Ribbon development was identified along at least one side of Ermine Street. Iron Age evidence was also identified (Palmer-Brown, 1994a).

Old Winteringham. Excavations. The site was occupied early in the Roman period and there is evidence of military construction, a fort is likely but not proven. Occupation continued into the fourth century (Whitwell 1995, 98-99).

Osgodby. A series of pottery scatters along the Roman road may be an extended interlinked group of settlements.

Owmby. Recent survey work by English Heritage, aerial photographs show settlement either side of the road and a possible back lane. There is possibly an Iron Age settlement as Corieltavian coins and Iron Age pottery have been found. Roman coins from the first century have been reported (Whitwell 1995, 96-98).

Saltesford. An extensive scatter of Roman material.

Sapperton. Occupied from the first to the fourth century and possibly into the fifth, Iron Age material identified from the site but it is all residual. The settlement consists of ribbon development along the Roman road (Simmons 1995).

Sleaford. Excavations from the 1960s have recently been published. The site is an important Iron Age centre (Elsdon 1997). Recent development to the east of the modern town is revealing more of the Roman settlement along the Roman road.

Stainfield. An extensive scatter of Roman material.

Ulceby Cross. An extensive scatter of Roman material.

Roads and waterways

The main road system of Roman Lincolnshire has been well established and accepted for some time (Margary 1973). Generally but not always fully metalled, these roads form the main lines of communications in the area.

Ermine Street

Fosseway

King Street/ Mareham Lane

Tillbridge Lane

Wragby Road running to Ulceby Cross and then down through Burgh-le-Marsh. A branch to the coast opposite a Roman site in Norfolk, is assumed to be the site of a ferry across the Wash.

Owmby to the Wolds

There are other secondary routes recognised as probably being ancient trackways that were used in the Roman period and may or may not have been metalled.

Caistor High Street

Blue Stone Heath Road running from close to Ludford along the ridge towards Ulceby Cross.

Barton Street. The road running along the edge of the marsh, becoming Louth Street but probably not a major highway.

Other minor routes and local roads are little known. Some can be picked up from aerial photographs but no comprehensive work on these has been carried out. There is the recently discovered stretch of road on the Humber foreshore (Carey, 1998). There are some roads recognised in the fenland, such as the Baston-Spalding gravel road running eastward from the uplands into the silt fen, and the associated network of trackways leading from it, part of the communication net in this area (Lane and Hayes 1992, 171-72). Some parts of the system of droveways noted by Hallam in the fens are now considered to be the remains of flood defence banks for the settlements in the area.

The only Roman bridge that has been noted has been at Lincoln, when timbers were seen during work in the nineteenth century. There is some evidence for a ford across the Trent at Littleborough where Tillbridge Lane crosses the river. There is evidence for a causeway across the Car Dyke at Billingborough (Simmons 1979).

Canals and navigable rivers

The Foss Dyke is almost certainly Roman. It connects the navigable Witham to the Trent, allowing safe inland communication from the Wash (and via navigable rivers into East Anglia) to the Humber and thence to York. River transport is likely to have been by river boat rather than sea-going vessels and cargoes would have been transhipped at suitable points along the rivers. Possible hard standings have been found at Lincoln and at Fiskerton (Palmer-Brown 1994b). A further riverside settlement near the mouth of the Trent has recently been examined (Van de Noort and Ellis 1998, 168-82).

No quay has been identified at Lincoln as yet although a length of wall suggestive of a quay was uncovered in the 1950s at the site of the Telephone Exchange east of the walled city and north of the Witham.

The Car Dyke is also Roman and the work by B. Simmons established that the southern part in Lincolnshire is not navigable along its entire length. It was used as a catchwater drain to help the draining of the fen margin and to assist settlement. There was a general increase in settlement across the lowlands of Britain in the second century. The construction of the Car Dyke was a major undertaking and has been associated with the visit of Hadrian in the early second century. The theory that it was also associated with an extensive imperial estate in the fens is still only conjecture.

Rural settlement

Major work was carried out in the fens by Hallam. More recent work by the Fenland Survey has complimented this. Second century settlement in the fens of Lincolnshire has traditionally been seen as settlement on virgin land directed by the Imperial government, possibly as Imperial estates. Recent arguments counter this theory by pointing out that Iron Age settlement has now been found in these areas. The draining of the fens does not necessarily need a central organisation. The local community might be expected to be able to achieve local drainage works and dykes to protect against floods.

There was work in the 1960s by the Welland Valley Research Committee on the Welland gravels investigating Romano-British settlement, nucleated farmsteads of different types in their landscape setting (Simpson 1966).

Most work has been done on Roman villas. However virtually all of this excavation was carried out in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Winterton is the only large villa site to have had recent extensive excavation. This showed the development of a Roman settlement and field system from the Iron Age to the fourth century, with a late Roman reorganisation of a large farm or estate centre in the fourth century. The evidence from villa excavations in Lincolnshire tend to suggest that they date from the later second century onwards into the fourth century. It is possible that the relatively early date of the majority of the excavations has given a bias against earlier Iron Age and Roman remains. Archaeological techniques in the nineteenth century were perhaps not adequate to fully record the more ephemeral remains of huts and timber buildings. Also large scale rebuilding in stone might damage earlier levels to some degree.

There has tended to be a perception that there are more villas in the south-west of the county (Hingley 1989, Fig.68). They can, however, be seen in some density running northwards along the Lincolnshire edge following the line of the escarpment. There are fewer in the Wolds and they are not found in the fenland. Although a late Roman high-status farmstead with hypocaust system and painted plaster was found during work at West Deeping. There are other such sites in this general area.

Some of the high status sites close to Lincoln might be villas of a more suburban nature, built as a retreat for the rich officials or local magnates living and working in Lincoln. Once Lincoln becomes a provincial capital there would presumably have been an increase in the number government posts. Greetwell villa has late mosaics and was an extensive high status residence on a par with the grandest villas in Britain.

A related issue when discussing Lincoln and its hinterland is the extent of the *territorium* of the colony, although several suggestions have been made there is no certain evidence for the nature and extent of Lincoln's land holdings.

Any change in the nature of settlement from the Iron Age into the Roman period is very difficult to assess from the archaeological record. How much change there is in material culture is still subject to debate. The spread of a cash economy and how the coinage is distributed across a variety of settlements and settlement types cannot yet be determined. It is said that Iron Age settlement continues virtually unchanged into the Roman period yet there are marked differences in Roman settlement patterns later in the second, third and fourth centuries when compared to the Iron Age. There is a variety of Romano-British settlement across the different geology of Lincolnshire. The processes of these changes are incompletely understood.

Religion and ritual

Temples are known at Nettleton and Kirmington where votive offerings have been recorded. Altars and statuary are found at Lincoln where one would expect a high degree of religious activity as it was a Roman city from its foundation as a colony; Roman government was closely tied to religion. There was a sculptural tradition in Lincoln and at Ancaster which has a number of surviving religious sculptures. It is significant that both sites would have easy access to good quality stone.

Other finds have suggested other religious centres. An altar from Whaplode, a ritual crown from Deeping St James, a votive tablet from Saltesford.

Burials

A large cemetery was excavated at Ancaster with about three hundred bodies. The majority of the bodies had been laid east-west the cemetery is suggested as fourth century but awaits full publication.

Earlier cemeteries are found at Lincoln. A number of early tombstones found south of the legionary fortress argue for an early cemetery perhaps associated with the presumed earlier fort. Recently cremations have been found just west of the lower walled area of the city. Other cemeteries have been identified around the Roman city but for the most part they were noted during residential development in the last hundred years or so and have now been built over.

Roman barrows are rare in the area although there may be more to be recognised in the cropmark evidence. Riseholme barrow and the barrows at Revesby have both been interpreted as Roman.

Christianity

Evidence for Christianity in Roman Lincolnshire is sparse. There are Christian lead tanks from Walesby, Bishop Norton and Caistor, and burials at Ancaster. At Lincoln there is possible evidence for a Bishop from Lincoln attending the Council of Arles in AD 314. The excavations at St Paul-in-the-Bail, Lincoln have tended to support the theory that there was a Christian community present in Lincoln in the late Roman period.

Industry

Pottery. There are kilns at Boultham/Swanpool near Lincoln. Several kilns have been identified but excavations have been few.

The Trent valley industry comprises a number of kilns in Lea, Fenton/Torksey, Knaith (Field & Palmer-Brown 1991).

South Carlton kilns are known to have supplied Hadrian's Wall, possibly using the Foss Dyke for transportation north.

There are a number of kilns in the area around Linwood and Market Rasen but again little published excavation.

There are also kilns at Messingham, Roxby and Bourne.

Regional ceramic traditions relate to kiln groups and more work is needed to understand the development of pottery industries in the area. In particular there are important assemblages of pottery that await publication. The Roman pottery traditions relate back to the Iron Age and much basic publication is still needed to allow pottery studies to proceed. Pottery studies have the potential to answer a wide variety of research questions, they are fundamental to the continued advance of knowledge in this period.

Salt. Salterns exist in an arc around the edge of the fenland in Lincolnshire, at Ingoldmells and at Wrangle. The salterns lay on the salt marsh at the edge of the marshy land often with settlement further towards the sea on the more stable marshland beyond them. No Roman saltern has been fully excavated and the techniques used in salt production are not certain nor are the dates of production known.

Iron Age salterns are found in the more or less the same areas. It is worth noting that the area of saltworking identified by Ptolemy and called *Salinae* being in the territory of the Catevellauni, is possibly in Lincolnshire. Formerly identified as Droitwich a recently published reassessment of Ptolemy's map suggests it may be on the east coast of Lincolnshire perhaps on the now eroded coastal area beyond Ingoldmells (Strang 1997, 23).

Iron. There are certainly ironstone deposits suitable for iron production in the county but the evidence for its use is sketchy. There is evidence for iron smelting at Hibaldstow, at Sapperton and at Creton Quarry (Trimble 1995). The commercial suburb of Lincoln shows evidence of iron-working and finds of slag are not uncommon on Roman sites. However the evidence for industrial production sites along the limestone ridge has not been systematically recorded and the survey work that has been done is limited and awaits publication.

Quarrying. There are quarries at Lincoln and Ancaster however the continued industrial use of these quarries into the medieval, post-medieval and modern periods has made their examination and recording very difficult. There may also have been exploitation of gravel for roads.

Late Roman transition.

Late Roman Lincoln has evidence for continued occupation in at least some areas of the city into the fifth century. There may have been a Christian community lead by their bishop.

On the Humber there is evidence for late Roman settlement in the late fourth century, an aisled building of the fourth century at Barton-on-Humber and a very late fourth century hoard provide an example of a farmstead surviving into the late fourth and perhaps even the early fifth centuries. Evidence assessed for the south Humber bank points to a fair degree of late Roman occupation (Whitwell 1988).

Detailed analysis of evidence from other parts of the county is awaited. Anglo-Saxon burials are found in, and adjacent to, Roman villas as at Scampton or at Denton where an inhumation was found in the

centre of a mosaic, evidence that the rooms of a Roman building were at least recognisable at the time of the burial. In the fens some sites with Anglo-Saxon pottery have now been found but they are not normally on the same site as Roman pottery, suggesting that rising waters had affected late Roman settlement.

A study of early Germanic metalwork and the fifth century cemeteries in the north of the county as at Kirton-in-Lindsey and Elsham has lead to the suggestion that there might have been Germanic mercenaries settled in North Lincolnshire before the end of the Roman period (Leahy 1984, 1993).

Evidence for the continuation of small towns is somewhat more sketchy. At Hibaldstow there were possible building platforms over fourth century building remains, indicating later occupation of the site possibly into the fifth century. There is evidence at Sapperton for fifth century occupation in one of the buildings examined. The best that can be said is that there was a general gradual decline and decay of towns.

Conclusions

There are other issues of interest in the period that could be mentioned but space has not allowed. For example further work on the coast line would be useful. In several areas, the evidence for the existing picture of Roman Lincolnshire is weak. Several publications of major excavation projects are still awaited, this is of particular concern for pottery studies. Basic surveys are still needed to record information in some areas which can then be incorporated into existing databases and placed in the public domain. The Lincolnshire part of the National Mapping Programme is now available and is a resource that will prove invaluable in many areas of research. The Fenland part of the Programme needs to be completed to compliment the existing information. Data to help support or to refute theories are vital, some are now available and future work will increasingly come to depend on this data.

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Bibliography

This bibliography is selective. The principal account of Roman Lincolnshire is B. Whitwell's volume in the History of Lincolnshire series (1992) and those seeking a fuller bibliography should begin with this work.

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